

RESOURCES

How to Work With Your Advertising Agency or PR Firm

Ten steps to ensuring a successful relationship

The Association of National Advertisers' first comprehensive benchmarking study of client-agency relations, a 2004 survey of 200 advertisers and 100 agencies, confirmed and quantified what every client has experienced firsthand: "When there is teamwork between the client and agency, agencies are 40% more likely to create their best work."

Great communications is the key to optimum teamwork between advertising agencies and their clients. Here are 10 steps you can take to develop and maintain the highest quality and most effective communications with your agency with the least possible investment of resources and time.

Step One – Be clear about what you want.

Develop a sound proposal when looking for a firm. Make sure you are clear about what you want and identify the tools you want to use before drafting your RFP. Make sure you articulate what you need and specify all of the tasks you need the agency to accomplish in the RFP.

Step Two – Communicate, communicate, communicate.

Establish an organizational intention and set procedures to maintain contact and understanding with the agency and its key players. Require that information in conference reports, media plans, estimates, and creative briefs be put in writing, and establish a sign-off approval process to ensure that objectives are understood. Set up regularly scheduled meetings with the agency team.

Step Three – Insist on a creative brief.

The creative brief should articulate what you want to communicate and to whom you want to communicate. Always insist on a creative brief, no matter the size or scope of the project. You will achieve faster and more cost-effective results, the agency will stay on target and deliver a better product, and you will avoid false starts and be more likely to meet your objectives.

Step Four – Insist on a media plan.

A media plan should specify the target audience, geography, media mix, gross rating points, and budgets by market. Always insist on a plan before the media buy, insist on seeing the buy before it is ordered, and insist on a complete post-buy analysis.

Step Five – Make sure you understand your agency's job-flow process.

You need to plan ahead to give the agency adequate lead time based on their job flow. Make sure the agency understands that you want quality work and will plan ahead to accommodate their job flow, and ask them for typical lead times. Then set up a schedule and hold the agency accountable for due dates.

RESOURCES

Step Six – Create a “nuclear-free” zone for open communication.

Professional disagreement isn't dangerous. It can lead to stronger communication and help generate better ideas. Let the agency make suggestions. It may help your ego if they just tell you what they think you want to hear, but it can hurt the final product. By same token, don't be afraid to disagree or tell them what you think. Both sides need to be free to be direct in order to get the best results.

Step Seven – Understand the financials.

Know how the financial arrangement with your agency works and the resources you are paying for. If you don't know ask. Find out the types of research your agency has access to (i.e., Nielsen, Arbitron, PRIZM, MRI, Claritas, Scarborough, etc.), what the research firms do, and what it costs. Ask your agency to tell you if and how you are wasting money.

Step Eight – Be a good leader.

For the project to succeed, you must take charge. You are the leader of the team, in addition to being a team member. Make decisions quickly, communicate them promptly, and make yourself available to answer questions.

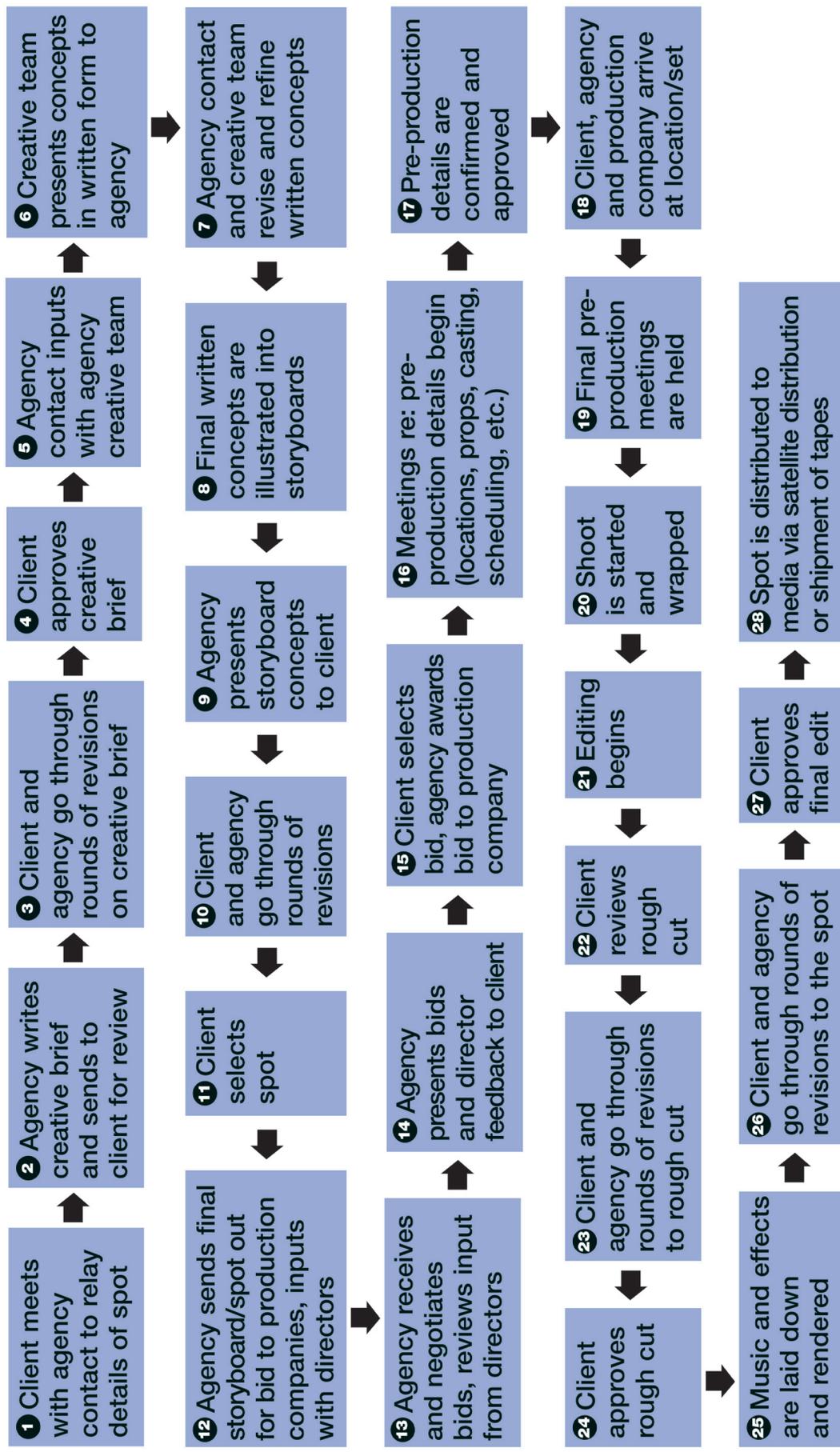
Step Nine – Insist on quality work.

You are entitled to the best work possible and should not settle for less. Ask for regular reviews and eliminate obstacles that hold up progress. Review the best samples of the agency's work and the work of others in the industry, and use them as benchmarks for comparison with the product you receive. If yours isn't up to par, find out why.

Step Ten– It's always broken.

No matter how well you and your agency are working together or how well your business is doing, you need to ask, “What else can we or should we be doing?” There are a host of new tools (online, guerilla marketing, non-sustaining media, social media, etc.) revolutionizing the advertising business; ask your agency about them and how they might add to your success.

RESOURCES



RESOURCES

Twelve Most Common Mistakes in Advertising

1. Desire for instant gratification

The ad that creates enough urgency to cause people to respond immediately is the ad most likely to be forgotten immediately once the offer expires. Such ads are of little use in establishing the advertiser's identity in the mind of the consumer.

2. Trying to reach more people than the budget will allow

For a media mix to be effective, each element in the mix must have enough repetition to establish retention in the mind of the prospect. Too often, however, the result of the media mix is too many people reached without enough repetition. Will you reach 100% of the people and persuade them 10% of the way? Or will you reach 10% of the people and persuade them 100% of the way? The cost is the same.

3. Assuming the business owner knows best

The business owner is uniquely unqualified to see his company or product objectively. Too much product knowledge leads him to answer questions no one is asking. He's on the inside looking out, trying to describe himself to a person on the outside looking in. It's hard to read the label when you're inside the bottle.

4. Unsubstantiated claims

Advertisers often claim to have what the customer wants, such as "highest quality at the lowest price," but fail to offer any evidence. An unsubstantiated claim is nothing more than a cliché the prospect is tired of hearing. You must prove what you say in every ad. Do your ads give the prospect new information? Do they provide a new perspective? If not, prepare to be disappointed with the results.

5. Improper use of passive media

Nonintrusive media, such as newspapers and yellow pages, tend to reach only buyers who are actively looking for the product. They are poor at reaching prospects before their need arises, so they're not much use for planting a reticular activator or creating a predisposition toward your company. The patient, consistent use of intrusive media, such as radio and television will win the heart of the customer before she's in the market for the product. Tell her *Why*; wait for *When*.

6. Creating ads instead of campaigns

It is foolish to believe a single ad can ever tell the entire story. The most effective, persuasive and memorable ads are those most like a rhinoceros; they make a single point, powerfully. An advertiser with 17 different things to say should commit to a campaign of at least 17 different ads, repeating each ad enough to stick in the prospect's mind.

RESOURCES

7. Obedience to unwritten rules

For some insane reason, advertisers want their ads to look and sound like ads. Why?

8. Late-week schedules

Advertisers justify their obsession with Thursday and Friday advertising by saying, "We need to reach the customer just before she goes shopping." Why do these advertisers choose to compete for the customer's attention each Thursday and Friday when they could have a nice, quiet chat all alone with her on Sunday, Monday and Tuesday?

9. Overconfidence in qualitative targeting

Many advertisers and media professionals grossly overestimate the importance of audience quality. In reality, saying the wrong thing has killed far more ad campaigns than reaching the wrong people. It's amazing how many people become "the right people" when you're saying the right thing.

10. Event-driven marketing

A special event should be judged only by its ability to help you more clearly define your market position and substantiate your claims. If 1% of the people who hear your ad for a special event choose to come, you will be in desperate need of a traffic cop and a bus to shuttle people from distant parking lots. Yet your real investment will be in the 99% who did not come! What did your ad say to them?

11. Great production without great copy

Too many ads today are creative without being persuasive. Slick, clever, funny, creative and different are poor substitutes for informative, believable, memorable and persuasive.

12. Confusing reactions with results

The goal of advertising is to create a clear awareness of your company and its unique selling proposition. Unfortunately, most advertisers evaluate their ads by the comments they hear from the people around them. When we mistake mere response for results, we create attention-getting ads that say absolutely nothing.

The Disciplined Process

- **Policy**
- **Program**
 - Traffic Research
 - FARS Data
 - Enforcement Data
 - VMT Data
- **Communications**
 - Market Research
 - Marketing Plan
 - Creative Development

